

OPEN/CLOSED QUESTIONING

The quality of the conversations we have with others is determined by the amount of effort we put into the conversation. High quality questions encourage and generate the high quality responses essential to a productive counselling session.

Open questions demand considerate thought, both from the speaker and the subject of the question. They take time and effort to formulate, and are asked by people who are genuinely interested in understanding the perspective or experiences of others. Closed questions, on the other hand, are effortless. They're not asked out of sincere curiosity, interest or concern; they're formalities employed to break the silence and make the enquirer appear sociable and polite. However, closed questions don't breed intrigue and exploration, and their tone and lexicon are so orchestrated that they never take into consideration the circumstance or individual they're addressed to.

If a counsellor doesn't make the effort to engage with their client, or isn't aware of the kind of questions they're asking, they'll find themselves subject to minimalistic, unproductive responses which won't help either party. However, by learning how to translate your closed questions to open ones, both you and your client will be able to reap the benefits of more informative and thorough dialogue.

Take a look at the following example below of a closed question and compare it to the open question alternative:

Closed question:

"Were you bullied at school?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about it."

Open Question:

"Tell me about your school experience; would you consider it a positive or negative time in your life? What were your experiences of bullying or stress (if you had any)?"

Below is a list of 20 closed questions. Take the time to convert each of the closed questions into an open question, thinking carefully about what response you would expect, or hope for, from the newly phrased question compared to the original.

1. How are you?

2. Did you have a good New Years?

3. Did you have a good day at work?

4. Did you like school?



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5. Do you like reading?

6. Did you see that film you wanted to see?

7. Are you doing anything for Christmas?

8. Are you going away this summer?

9. Have you ever felt depressed?

10. Did you have a good childhood?

11. Are you close to your parents?

12. Do you have self-esteem issues?

13. Do you ever feel anxious?

14. Do you go out much?

15. Are you seeing anyone?

16. What do you do in your spare time?

17. Do you like yourself?



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18. How's the job?

19. How's your mother/sibling/friend/etc.?

20. Do you like music?

SECOND EXERCISE

Now that you have the hang of converting questions into open questions, have a go at practicing the difference on a close friend or family member. First, ask them a closed question followed by an open one and compare the responses you get.

